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One bill really is about jobs

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One bill really is about jobs

Guest column by BOB BROWN missoulia.com | Posted: Monday, April 4, 2011 8:01 am | 1 Comment

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"Job, jobs, jobs" arises from the Montana Capitol this legislative session like the incantation of priests in a Hindu temple. Montana needs more than a mantra. We do need jobs, and while both Republicans and Democrats chant the job talk, their conflicting philosophies are constantly at cross purposes in terms of how jobs can be created.

There is one bill before this session of the Legislature that will unquestionably create a significant number of high paying private sector jobs without contradicting either party's sacred tenets of political orthodoxy.

House Bill 439 would, through the free market, take advantage of today's historically favorable financing environment to issue bonds for the construction of \$90 million dollars worth of state projects. As a rule of thumb, a million dollars of construction results 28 jobs. By that calculation HB439 would create more than 2,500 jobs.

Eight construction projects are included in the bill. Most of them have long been delayed or deferred.

Grover Cleveland was in the White House when Main Hall was built on the Montana Western campus in Dillon. It is a beautiful historic structure, and source of pride to the Montana University system.

The electrical wiring in the building was installed in the administration of Calvin Coolidge. That is not something to be proud of. HB439 would rewire old Main at Western and make other long needed modifications to the old building which also serves as the primary classroom facility on the Montana Western Campus.

The MSU-Billings Science and Technology Center is one of the original buildings on that campus. Its 14 classrooms and labs are in dire need of updating to meet the modern demands of technology for both students and faculty.

The University of Montana College of Technology in Missoula was built for an enrollment of 700 students. It is now serving 2,400. Montana's increasing number of two-year technical students are interested in training for jobs. They, and Montana employers, deserve a better educational facility than Missoula COT can offer them now.

Like the College of Technology in Missoula, Montana's Historical Society Museum in Helena is also bursting at the seams. The backlog of historical artifacts and treasures of Montana's fascinating Native American, pioneering, literary, and resource-rich history for many years have not been possible to display. We should be more vigilant caretakers of Montana's memory.

Educational opportunity in the sometimes neglected areas of energy, agriculture and industrial trades would be greatly enhanced by the construction of Skilled Trades Building II on the campus of MSU-Great Falls. Expanded job training opportunities would be specifically targeted to develop the Great Falls region's economy, but would be more available, too, to all interested Montanans in practical job training.

Long-deferred classroom renovation at the main MSU campus in Bozeman would be designed to meet more modern and technical higher educational needs. In addition, in Bozeman, the state laboratories which conduct testing and analysis ranging from brucellosis to pesticide residues in soils and plants, would be expanded and improved.

As Vietnam veterans age with their generation of "baby boomers" there will be an increasing need for long-term care for our veterans. Southwest Montana veterans have not had such a facility available to them in their part of the state. A new Southwest Veterans Home could be constructed in part with federal money, if matched by the state through enactment of HB439.

Future generations will directly benefit from the jobs and small business opportunities made possible now by HB439. The needs are real and the time is right. Legislators can create real jobs, or just fight, fight, fight.

Bob Brown is a former Montana secretary of state and state Senate president, and a current member of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees.

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